

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.  
Painting of Worsthorne old Hall.

In the quaint village of Worsthorne, a time of brutal and bloodthirsty spectacles was still within living memory. The remnants of a savage past clung to the hearts and minds of the villagers, as they spoke in hushed tones of the last bull bait that had taken place.

It was a day etched in the memory of young and old alike. The bull, a creature owned by the notorious Jim Anson, was tethered to a stake near the very gates of the present-day church. Excitement filled the air as the preparations were made for the gruesome spectacle.

The game was simple, yet cruel. The bull, restrained by a fifteen-yard tether, awaited its fate. The signal was given, and a powerful bull terrier was unleashed upon the enraged beast. The dog's goal was to seize the bull by its nose, while its master desperately clung onto one of the dog's forelegs. The victor would be declared if they could maintain this tenuous grip for three long minutes.

Among the spectators gathered that day was a man known as Old Nick O'Ellises, accompanied by his formidable dog, Crib. Old Nick was a sight to behold, marred by the scars of smallpox and bearing a prominent cherry-red nose. It was a matter of debate among the onlookers as to whether the dog or its owner was the more pleasing to the eye.

Amidst the cries and cheers of the crowd, the battle ensued. The bull and the dog locked in a primal struggle for dominance. The ground trembled under their combined fury as they strained against one another. Time seemed to stand still as the minutes ticked away, each second an eternity for the participants and the anxious spectators.

In the end, it was Old Nick O'Ellises and his loyal Crib who emerged victorious. The dog's relentless grip and the man's unwavering strength had prevailed. The crowd erupted in applause mixed with a twinge of unease. For while the outcome thrilled the senses, the savagery of the contest left an indelible mark on their consciousness.

The reminiscences of Worsthorne did not end with the horrors of bull baiting. The village also bore witness to another blood sport, the brutal practice of cockfighting. The bottom of the moor served as the battlegrounds, where men gathered during the middle of the previous century to witness these cruel spectacles.

"Mains" were fought on Sundays, drawing participants from all walks of life. Astonishingly, the vile game attracted not only the lower classes but also members of the upper echelons of society. Even the local gentry could be found among the eager onlookers, waiting for the battles to commence.

However, the true anticipation arose when the arrival of old Jimmy Roberts, a renowned cotton manufacturer from Burnley, was announced. His presence was heralded by the rhythmic sound of hooves as he rode atop his trusty bay pony. It was said that the fights would not commence until the distinguished Jimmy Roberts graced the scene.

Jimmy Roberts, born in 1779 and meeting his demise in 1830, possessed a charisma that demanded attention. His reputation as a patron of this cruel sport had earned him a place of honor among the spectators. As he arrived, the fervor of the crowd heightened, and the proceedings began, fueled by his presence.

These barbaric practices persisted until the year 1830, when a changing tide of sentiment led to their gradual demise. The memories of those times, however, continued to haunt the village of Worsthorne, a testament to a past steeped in darkness and cruelty. As the years passed, the villagers learned to cast off those horrific traditions, embracing a more enlightened and compassionate way of life.

And so, the reminiscences of Worsthorne served as a reminder of a bygone era, a stark contrast to the peaceful and harmonious village that now thrived in its place.

By Donald Jay